

Beyond the Resignation Debate

A New Framework for Civil-Military Dialogue

Maj Jim Golby, USA

Abstract

Recent debates about whether senior military officers can offer public dissent or resign in protest have a disproportionate impact on civil-military relations. As a result, many discussions focus primarily on how the civil-military dialogue has broken down and offer little advice to senior officers about how they can—and should—engage properly in effective civil-military dialogue. Scholars should begin a more constructive discussion about how to best integrate military advice into today's policy-making process. Although military expertise is imperfect and only one input policy makers should consider, a forthright, candid civil-military dialogue decreases the likelihood of strategic miscalculation and increases the odds of effective policy making. To complement scholarly discussions that discourage political activity by military officers, this article develops a Clausewitzian framework for introducing military advice into what is always a political context. It offers practical suggestions for military officers and hopes to stimulate further debate about what positive norms could shape the civil-military dialogue.



Although the circumstances in which senior military officers would contemplate resignation are exceedingly rare, debates about whether officers should resign are increasingly common. The latest round in this discussion developed in 2014, following testimony by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Martin Dempsey, US Army, before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). While discussing the

Maj Jim Golby is an active duty Army officer, currently serving on the Joint Staff. He holds a PhD in political science from Stanford University and has published numerous articles on American civil-military relations.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2015		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2015 to 00-00-2015	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Beyond the Resignation Debate: A New Framework for Civil-Military Dialogue				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air Force Research Institute, Strategic Studies Quarterly, 155 N. Twining Street, Maxwell AFB, AL, 36112				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Recent debates about whether senior military officers can offer public dissent or resign in protest have a disproportionate impact on civilmilitary relations. As a result, many discussions focus primarily on how the civil-military dialogue has broken down and offer little advice to senior officers about how they can???and should???engage properly in effective civil-military dialogue. Scholars should begin a more constructive discussion about how to best integrate military advice into today???'s policy-making process. Although military expertise is imperfect and only one input policy makers should consider, a forthright, candid civilmilitary dialogue decreases the likelihood of strategic miscalculation and increases the odds of effective policy making. To complement scholarly discussions that discourage political activity by military officers, this article develops a Clausewitzian framework for introducing military advice into what is always a political context. It offers practical suggestions for military officers and hopes to stimulate further debate about what positive norms could shape the civil-military dialogue.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 29	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

campaign to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Dempsey stated that—if necessary—he would recommend to the president that US military personnel accompany Iraqi troops in ground attacks.¹ His qualified statement made immediate news, as it signaled potential disagreement with the president's position to avoid introducing US forces into ground fighting in Iraq.

The response to General Dempsey's statement was swift, with more than a dozen op-eds or blogs published on the topic over the next few days and weeks. Many of these pieces were careless exhortations to resign in a flourish of disagreement; others were explicitly partisan. However, the debate also included thoughtful contributions from several respected voices, including those of Don Snider, emeritus professor of political science at the US Military Academy, and Lt Gen James Dubik, US Army, retired.² These scholars are not alone in thinking anew about dissent and resignation; approval for the practice of resignation in protest is on the rise, at least among veterans.³

The growing acceptance of resignation as an appropriate tactic during policy deliberations threatens America's tradition of civilian control of the military. It also raises concerns about whether senior civilian and military leaders possess the mutual respect necessary for effective strategic dialogue. More importantly, perhaps, the stalemated debate about whether military officers should resign actually exacerbates mistrust and skepticism among civilian leaders and undermines effective civil-military dialogue.

It is time to move beyond—or at least significantly broaden—this unproductive debate and begin a more constructive discussion about how to best integrate military advice into today's policy-making process. Although military expertise is imperfect and only one input policy makers consider, a forthright, candid civil-military dialogue decreases the likelihood of strategic miscalculation and increases the odds of effective policy making. To complement scholarly discussions that discourage political activity by military officers, a Clausewitzian framework can be used to introduce military advice into what is always a political context. This framework will help stimulate further debate about what positive norms could shape the civil-military dialogue.

This article first discusses the most thoughtful pieces from the recent resignation debate to make the case for a different dialogue. Next, it shows how the resignation debate is emblematic of larger problems in

the broader literature on dissent and civil-military discourse. It then develops a Clausewitzian framework for the civil-military dialogue, building on insights about the unique nature and limitations of military expertise and potential implications of this model in helping military leaders know how to provide advice in a political context. Finally, the article concludes with recommended institutional changes or reforms that could reinforce more productive civil-military relations.

The Resignation Debate

The debate that emerged following General Dempsey's SASC testimony was, in many ways, similar to previous professional discussions about resignation—albeit arguably more robust.⁴ Retired officers, former defense officials, pundits, and even sitting members of Congress publicly encouraged Dempsey to resign in protest over what they viewed as the Obama administration's misguided war policies.⁵ However, this debate has advanced flawed arguments concerning resignation and has potentially contributed to deteriorating trust between civilian and military leaders.

Drawing inspiration from a misguided reading of Army lieutenant general H. R. McMaster's *Derelection of Duty*, these critics generally assert that Dempsey—and other senior military leaders—have the right and even the obligation to resign in protest before they become complicit in failed military strategies.⁶ In their view, McMaster's history of the Americanization of the Vietnam War castigates senior military leaders for not resigning and instead “quietly carrying out orders they knew to be wrong.”⁷ Moreover, some of them assert that even a private resignation threat by Dempsey “might well change a bad policy” and “save this President from himself.”⁸ Thus, critics imply that military leaders should take advantage of the fact that no president would want to face the political costs resulting from a high-level military resignation.

The belief that it can be good for legitimately elected civilian leaders to fear threats from their own military is deeply flawed; such sentiments are unequivocally inconsistent with civilian control and American constitutional principles. The military may disagree with civilian decisions, but the Constitution reserves decision making for those in elected office. As scholar Peter D. Feaver has succinctly noted, elected civilian leaders have the “right to be wrong.”⁹ Moreover, the insinuation that military

leaders should view resignation as a tool to influence political leaders' policy decisions is likely to undermine the trust necessary for a healthy civil-military relationship.¹⁰ As a result, scholars like Richard H. Kohn and Peter Feaver worry that the practice of resignation by senior officers would undermine trust, risk politicization of the officer corps, and threaten civilian control of the military.¹¹ Despite these concerns, these scholars nevertheless strongly agree that officers have the right—in fact, the duty—to resign (i.e., to ask for reassignment or retirement) or to disobey if directed to carry out an illegal order.

However, several respected observers of civil-military relations suggest a slender area of legitimate resignation lies between legal obligation and policy objection. They make a thoughtful case for resignation on carefully drawn moral grounds. Don Snider argues that members of the profession require moral autonomy. Thus, there may be circumstances that demand acts of dissent or disobedience—to include resignation.¹² According to Snider, military officers not only have a Constitutional obligation to carry out the wishes of their client—the American people—but also have a responsibility to ethically apply the profession's expert knowledge. On these grounds, he argues that there is a narrow “protected space”¹³ in which military officers can voice dissent or even resign “without insubordination to civilian authority.”¹⁴

Similarly, General Dubik argues that principled resignation places “neither good order and discipline nor civilian control of the military” at risk.¹⁵ Providing senior officers resign privately without public posturing, he contends the ability to resign on moral grounds protects officers' moral agency by allowing them to remain true to their conscience. It is only when officers act for political reasons and threaten to air their concerns to embarrass or coerce that they undermine civilian control and cross an unacceptable line.

Taken together, Snider and Dubik suggest that there, in fact, may be circumstances under which senior officers could—and perhaps should—consider resignation. Yet neither author fully grapples with the difficult trade-offs their arguments imply. When placed under closer scrutiny, the “narrow protected space” for resignation that Snider and Dubik attempt to defend turns out to be vanishingly small.

Dubik, for example, considers the case of Army chief of staff Gen Harold Johnson, who contemplated resignation during the Vietnam War after he concluded that the president's war policy was “wasting

lives.”¹⁶ Although Johnson ultimately did not resign, Dubik contends the Army chief’s resignation would have been justified if he had done so quietly. Dubik properly criticizes an alleged plan under which the Army chief had intended to hold a press conference immediately after notifying the president that he intended to resign.¹⁷

What is not clear, however, is if a senior officer can control whether or not a resignation will remain private.¹⁸ As General Johnson’s case of a “near-resignation” implies, there simply is no tradition of resignation in the US military. Thus, it is difficult to know exactly how one could accomplish a “quiet” resignation in practice, especially if a senior officer were to resign in the middle of a controversial war. It is likely that any high-level resignation would prompt significant political consequences.¹⁹ Leaks from staff would be almost inevitable—as would be aggressive questioning from the president’s opponents in Congress. The resulting press coverage and public speculation would be equally aggressive and intense. As the recent Dempsey case suggests, quiet resignation would be extremely difficult—really impossible—in today’s political climate.

Even if a quiet resignation were possible, neither Snider nor Dubik help us tangibly understand what constitutes an immoral policy. In fact, their arguments rely on different moral foundations. For Dubik, resignation is a matter of individual moral conscience; for Snider, it is a matter of the moral autonomy—and hence authority—of the profession. These two approaches suffer from different problems, but both possess the potential to undermine civilian control of the military.

As he illustrates in the Johnson case, Dubik’s standard for an immoral policy is whether it “wastes lives.”²⁰ At first glance, the application of this standard to General Johnson’s doubts about the Vietnam War seems appealing. However, the issues at stake were almost certainly less clear at the time than they are in retrospect. Other officers and policy makers with recognized expertise had reasonable disagreements with Johnson at the time. Moreover, the logic of “wasted lives” versus “cost in lives” is itself highly subjective. In fact, measured against this standard, any civilian who does not give the military all the resources it requests or who does not pursue the strategy the military recommends wastes lives, at least to some degree. Consequently, there is no room for any civilian restraint on military policy. Who decides where to draw the line in terms of the cost in lives or how many wasted lives? For Dubik, this discretion

resides entirely with the individual's conscience, leaving open a wide loophole for military resignation on myriad policy issues.²¹

Snider's argument is more nuanced, relying on the moral authority of the profession instead of the individual officer's conscience. Yet this approach creates different challenges. First, expert knowledge is, by its nature, uncertain—especially for members of the military profession. Officers have fewer opportunities to practice their craft than members of other professions do. Peacetime is frequent, and officers rarely—if ever—experience war at the same level of responsibility during their careers. Moreover, war—by its nature—is extremely complex.²² Thus, judgments about the consequences of a policy decision surrounding military conflict will always involve relatively greater levels of ambiguity.²³

Second, a corporate standard for resignation based on the moral autonomy of the profession must rely, to some degree, on a professional ethic or an objective standard. Yet there is debate about whether an American military ethic can, or should, exist and whether one exists at present.²⁴ As a result, officers face significant limitations in attempting to rely on the profession's ethic as a standard for judging the morality of a policy decision.

Finally, even if military officers were relatively certain of the consequences of a policy decision and could agree to a professional standard upon which to judge the morality of consequences, this logic itself would preclude individual resignation and instead dictate disobedience by the officer corps as a whole. A judgment based on the collective moral autonomy of the profession, rather than on an individual's conscience, would require general consensus among members of the profession and thus would preclude any form of quiet resignation. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to imagine the circumstances under which an officer could resign on moral grounds without engaging in, as Snider puts it, "insubordination to civilian authority."²⁵

Snider is largely silent on the question of disobedience, but his arguments about the profession's requirement for moral autonomy rest on James Burk's concept of "responsible obedience."²⁶ Burk, a professor of sociology at Texas A&M University, agrees that senior officers share moral accountability for their actions and advice, but that responsibility is constrained and must be channeled appropriately. According to Burk, "obedience to the principle that civilian leaders rule does not necessarily create a world of blind obedience, not so long as the military profession

retains its autonomy to cultivate its expert knowledge and to introduce it into policy deliberations.”²⁷ Military leaders can neither responsibly disobey nor resign when faced with an immoral order, but they have a clear responsibility to communicate their expertise and advice candidly during policy deliberations.

The effective development of strategy depends on the close integration of civilian and military perspectives.²⁸ Nevertheless, the Constitution clearly subordinates military prerogatives to the policy decisions of civilians and civilian institutions.²⁹ Thus, at the most fundamental level, attempts by senior officers to claim the legitimate authority necessary to judge the morality of a policy on behalf of the Republic are inconsistent with civilian control of the military. As Burk argues, “If there is a conflict in judgment between political leaders and military professionals over the wisdom of a policy to use armed force, it is not necessarily the case that the political leader is right and the military professional wrong. Often, the matter will be surrounded by enough uncertainty no one could be sure which judgment should be preferred. Yet, in the end, someone must decide, and . . . these rules are embedded in the Constitution.”³⁰

Our republican system of governance presupposes that there will always be moral disagreements about policy outcomes, and it establishes a system of civilian institutions within which to resolve those disputes. Operating in this system does not require senior military leaders to obey blindly, but it does require “responsible obedience.” Officers have a constitutional responsibility to offer expert advice, but they should not resign or disobey a lawful order when their advice is not taken. The status of a profession relies on its ability to *profess*, not on its ability to *dictate*.³¹

Larger Problems in Civil-Military Relations

Although Snider’s and Dubik’s arguments seem compelling in principle, their narrow space of resignation vanishes in practice. Indeed, Dubik and Snider both explicitly state that the Dempsey case came nowhere near meeting their criteria for principled resignation.³² In addition, unlike many bloggers and pundits, neither Snider nor Dubik support public resignation in protest, nor do they support politically motivated threats by senior officers intended to intimidate or coerce civilian leaders. Yet there is suggestive evidence that the resignation debate itself may be harming trust and the civil-military relationship. Support

for resignation in protest has been on the rise in recent years. In 1999, for example, only 27 percent of all veterans agreed that a senior officer should resign in protest in the face of an “unwise” order. However, by 2014, 59 percent thought so.³³ Moreover, the recent round of blog posts and op-eds supporting politically motivated, rather than principled, resignation contributes to skepticism among civilian leaders and general civil-military distrust. While levels of trust among the public remain high, partisan differences have emerged—especially among elites. Currently, 94 percent of Republicans express “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in the military, but only 61 percent of all Democrats and 49 percent of elite Democrats feel the same.³⁴

Neither Snider and Dubik nor other thoughtful observers of civil-military relations have caused the trends described above. However, by responding to partisan arguments about resignation in protest during an ongoing policy debate, scholars risk legitimizing flawed arguments about resignation. They make politically motivated resignations seem plausible to civilian leaders. Even when presented with careful analyses, it can be difficult to grasp the nuance involved in these debates. In the age of blogs and social media, continued debate exacerbates civil-military tension in ongoing policy discussions that clearly do not warrant resignation by either set of standards.

Just as important, by focusing on the question of whether officers can resign under extremely rare circumstances, scholars ignore far more pressing questions of greater import to American civil-military relations. For example, Dubik’s analysis of General Johnson’s almost-resignation never considers the Army chief’s role during policy deliberations about whether to mobilize the reserves. Although intelligence analyst and military historian Lewis Sorley argues that Johnson was sharply critical during policy deliberations, other evidence suggests Johnson failed to fully articulate his reservations about the proposed policy to the secretary of defense or the president either before or after a decision was made.³⁵ Moreover, according to McMaster’s account, Johnson deliberately misled members of Congress and withheld information because—in Johnson’s own words—he owed “allegiance principally to the President.”³⁶ By asserting that the Army chief had a right to resign, Dubik ignores prior questions about whether Johnson met his basic responsibilities to support constitutional processes as a senior military advisor.

The current debate about resignation and disobedience fuels the narrative that there is a dearth of trust between civilian and military leaders. It also focuses on the rare circumstances in which the civil-military dialogue has completely broken down. Moreover, it ignores a wide range of institutional issues, including decisions about future force structure, resource management, training, recruiting and retention, and assessments of long-term risk. Consequently, this debate offers little guidance that would help senior officers navigate their daily responsibilities during today's policy-making process. In this regard, the resignation debate is emblematic of an existing gap within the broader literature on the civil-military dialogue.

As it stands, the civil-military relations literature is heavy on prohibitions, explaining what officers cannot do, and light on specifics about how officers can be involved in the policy-making process. Beginning with Samuel P. Huntington's model of objective control, officers are told to abstain from political activity of any kind.³⁷ However, as Burk's model of responsible obedience suggests, there may not always be a clear distinction between political and military spheres. Political leaders often depend on information they obtain from military leaders to weigh their options and make decisions. Thus, senior military leaders must be prepared to operate at the nexus of policy and strategy.³⁸ Nevertheless, current Army doctrine stipulates that professionals "confine their advisory role to the policymaking process" but offers no guidance about how to exercise this role. The sole direction given in Army doctrine is that military leaders should "not engage publicly in policy advocacy or dissent."³⁹ The other military services provide no guidance in doctrine on the matter. Surely, more can be said about the role of military expertise in policy debates. How does one responsibly walk this path?

There have been some signs of progress in recent years. For example, Risa A. Brooks, associate professor of political science at Marquette University, considers the potential costs and benefits of political activity by military officers in a democracy.⁴⁰ Brooks recognizes some clear benefits of political activity by military officers but concludes that the costs ultimately outweigh the benefits. Yet Brooks's analysis also fails to recognize that military advice is always delivered in a political context. Although she identifies a typology including different types of political behaviors, she never actually defines what makes a particular act political rather than military.⁴¹ As a result, she offers little guidance to military leaders

about what they can or should say during the policy process or to civilian leaders about how they could obtain any of the benefits of military expertise. Ultimately, the inference is to safeguard civilian control and that military advice must remain only within the confines of private policy deliberations.

While agreeing that military officers should not engage in political activity, other scholars nevertheless leave room for officers to engage in dissent—sometimes even public dissent.⁴² Framing military advice and expertise in terms of dissent creates several problems, however. First, it implies that the relationship between the president and senior military leaders is of primary importance, while downplaying the importance of the congressional role in civil-military relations. Yet military leaders have a constitutional obligation to support all branches of government in their policy-making duties. When military leaders fail to provide all relevant information to congressional leaders, as General Johnson did, they undermine the proper functioning of constitutional processes of oversight.

Second, a focus on the dissent side of military advice reinforces the narrative of broader civil-military tension and distrust, undermining the positive role military expertise can—and should—play in policy debates. Rather than encouraging officers to speak candidly and to offer their considered military judgment on topics related to military expertise, framing the strategic dialogue around dissent teaches them to focus on situations in which civilian leaders disagree with them. In a divided republic, the reality is that military advice will frequently dissent from the position of at least some political actors, especially in the current political environment.⁴³ While officers should be aware of these potential conflicts and exercise some political savvy, they should not be focused primarily on which political actors agree or disagree with them. Instead, they should be concerned with giving the most accurate and candid assessment possible, consistent with their unique military expertise.

Finally, a focus on military dissent reinforces the notion that military advice is a tool to wield against civilian leaders rather than the fulfillment of a constitutional responsibility to support elected leaders in the conduct of their duties. Military leaders should not offer advice to achieve the policy outcomes they prefer; rather, they provide one form of expertise that can help political leaders make more effective policy decisions, typically as part of a broader strategy.

Instead of focusing on the question of whether apolitical military officers can resign or dissent after the civil-military dialogue breaks down, scholars should dedicate more energy toward articulating the positive role professional military officers can play in policy deliberations. Although military officers do not possess the constitutional authority to adjudicate between competing versions of the “common good,” they do have a critical responsibility to inform policy debates and discussions.⁴⁴

Professional officers looking for guidance on how to render military advice in a political context need more guidance than the current literature provides. It is not enough to tell military officers that civilians have the “right to be wrong”; officers need a new framework to help them understand how they can give advice in such a way that will help civilian leaders be right more often but that does not threaten civilian primacy. Military leaders need more robust norms and guidelines that can help them understand how to find their voice in the unequal dialogue. Drawing on the central insights of Carl von Clausewitz, the next section develops a framework for expert military advice in the policy-making process.

A Clausewitzian Framework for Military Expertise and Advice

The search for a new framework turns to an old source for inspiration. Carl von Clausewitz is perhaps best known for his insight that war is always political in nature: “the continuation of politics with the addition of other means.”⁴⁵ Yet his dialectical approach offers a much richer and more nuanced view of both the unity and distinctiveness of the military and the political aspects of war. According to Clausewitz, politics establishes the source of war, dictates the available means, and determines the desired ends.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, “war is special activity, different and separate from any other pursued by man.”⁴⁷ Within its subordinate sphere, then, war retains the logic of politics, but military expertise has its own “grammar.”⁴⁸

Since political leaders sometimes “may lack a detailed knowledge of military matters,” Clausewitz requires military leaders to provide unique military advice as part of a robust strategic dialogue.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he is much more concerned about the influence of the political on the military, rather than vice versa. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that the

senior military leader should sit in the cabinet so political leaders may shape his activities.⁵⁰ In contrast, Clausewitz expects military expertise may inform political decisions but not dictate political ends.

Clausewitz provides a much more complete account of the nature and limitations of military expertise. This perspective on the military leader's expert knowledge does not suggest that military leaders are always right and civilian leaders are always wrong in matters of war; rather, it suggests that close and continuous dialogue between military and civilian leaders is required to ensure strategic success. Moreover, it places clear responsibility on military leaders to develop special expertise related to military affairs.

Military Expertise

It is within the grammar of war where Clausewitz identifies unique military expertise, or military genius. Whereas civilian expertise lies within the realm of policy, the grammar of war centers on combat.⁵¹ Thus, the military leader must be expert in the conduct of war to include both tactics and military strategy, as well as the "creation, maintenance, and use" of fighting forces.⁵² All of these activities ultimately must relate to combat.

Yet military expertise faces significant limitations. Unlike other human activities, war is extremely complex because it "takes place in a unique environment of danger, fear, physical exertion, and uncertainty."⁵³ It is neither an art nor a science; rather, it is something akin to a duel on a larger scale.⁵⁴ The strategic interaction with a human adversary and the complexity of the environment in which war takes place make war inherently unpredictable.

For Clausewitz, it is precisely this capricious nature that provides the basis of military expertise and defines its limitations. Although "everything in strategy is very simple," he maintains that the military leader requires "great strength of character, as well as great lucidity and firmness of mind . . . to carry out the plan."⁵⁵ Years of experience and practice provide senior military leaders with the ability to "know friction in order to overcome it whenever possible, and in order not to expect a standard of achievement in his operations which this very friction makes impossible."⁵⁶ Clausewitz recognized that combat experience is itself punctuated and rare. Although he advises military leaders to turn to training

and the study of military history to supplement experience, he recognizes that even the best commanders will often get things wrong.

Modern attempts to develop a military science only underscore Clausewitz's perspective about the limits of military expertise. Moreover, the addition of new military and political tools of influence only exacerbates this complexity. As one commentator has noted, "Military science is not normally so exact as to rule out all but one school of thought on the question of how battles are to be fought and wars won. As a result, military planners frequently find themselves uncertain or divided regarding the kinds of preparations necessary to support the foreign policy purposes of the nation."⁵⁷

Despite recognizing these significant challenges, Clausewitz nevertheless devotes a significant amount of time to identifying the skills and characteristics required to develop military genius. Although military officers' understanding will always be limited and imperfect, a grasp of the grammar of war is nevertheless necessary to develop and implement effective strategy. Within the realm of combat, a military expert must be able to identify the military resources required to accomplish a given end and estimate the costs and risks of a campaign.⁵⁸ These skills are necessary because of both practical and political constraints. The unlimited application of resources would "result in strength being wasted, which is contrary to other principles of statecraft."⁵⁹ It could also undermine domestic support if the means used in a military operation are disproportionate to the ends sought.⁶⁰ Consequently, Clausewitz pays close attention to the military leader's need to strive for an optimal balance between the two.

According to Clausewitz, military experts must fully understand the capabilities at their disposal and how long military actions will take. This burden is indeed significant as demonstrated by the level of detail he devoted to tactical and operational questions, and it requires the careful study of military history and theories of war.⁶¹ "Practice and experience dictate the answer [to questions of feasibility]: this is possible, that is not."⁶² Thus, military experts possess a keen understanding of both what military force can accomplish and what it cannot.

In addition to understanding the means-ends relationship, military leaders must also possess the creativity and expertise necessary to generate options and develop ways consistent with war's political constraints. Clausewitz acknowledges the potential there is more than one path to

success when he argues, “given certain conditions, different ways of reaching the objective are possible.”⁶³ Yet military experts must be attuned to the political context when developing military options to support political ends because “questions of personality and personal relations raise the number of possible ways of achieving the goal of policy to infinity.”⁶⁴ Political leaders may consider certain military approaches to be off limits for moral or political reasons, or they may request to use military resources in particular ways. Yet Clausewitz suggests that military leaders must be open to allowing political leaders to choose what they consider the optimum path to their political objectives. Military leaders nevertheless have a responsibility to share their expertise on the feasibility of options, but they should recognize that nonmilitary factors may sometimes influence their approach.

Thus, even if they are deeply familiar with the grammar of war, military leaders must not be ignorant of domestic politics. Especially at the highest levels of command, military experts must have a sound grasp of national policy. Again, Clausewitz states, “No major proposal for war can be worked out in ignorance of political factors.”⁶⁵ For example, the scale of political purposes will have significant implications for the military means required and myriad other factors: “The political object—the original motive for the war—will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.”⁶⁶

As a result, all military planning must proceed from its political basis. If anyone attempts to separate war from its political aspects, they will be “left with something pointless and devoid of sense.”⁶⁷ For Clausewitz, then, the unity of war does not come from the overlapping nature of civilian and military spheres but rather from the primacy of the civilian sphere.⁶⁸

Civilian Expertise

Although Clausewitz identifies the unique nature of military expertise, he identifies certain topics as outside the bounds of the military realm and squarely within the civilian sphere. Most notably, he places the onus for the ends of policy on civilian leaders. In distinguishing the commander and his army from the government, he unambiguously asserts, “the political aims are the business of the government alone.”⁶⁹ Civilian leaders alone dictate the ends of policy. Through the establishment

of policy, governments are the arbiters and custodians of the people's interests. Regardless of a nation's domestic institutional arrangements:

It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.⁷⁰

Thus, civilian leaders alone are responsible for interpreting the "will of the people," identifying national values and interests, and making final judgments about how much risk the government can accept in particular areas. Moreover, since these factors are outside the grammar of war, military experts have no basis upon which to judge them. Instead, they must assume that the outcomes of policy are consistent with the interests of the community.⁷¹

Domestic politics and political organization also fall outside the military sphere. Civilian leaders bear full responsibility for all domestic political factors and economic considerations. When planning, military leaders must remember "strategy does not inquire how a country should be organized and a people trained in order to produce the best military results. It takes these matters as it finds them."⁷² Even on questions of how to mobilize the nation and what level of resources can be provided during times of crisis, Clausewitz places responsibility for domestic political judgments squarely with civilian leaders. He also expects the government to dictate the size of the military and the system of supply.⁷³ After providing expert advice about the necessary resources, the military commander accepts the means he is given and uses such means as effectively as possible.⁷⁴

Of course, many policy judgments about the ends of policy or domestic organization may be contingent on the required means, costs, or duration. Political leaders may decide that the benefits inherent in some outcomes simply may not be worth the necessary effort. Consequently, they may choose to reduce the ends sought or forego an action altogether. In these cases, civilian decisions about the ends of policy or domestic organization are contingent on military expertise; however, this does not imply that military experts themselves have responsibility over these decisions. Rather, they have a responsibility to provide the

information civilian leaders require to interpret the public's will and to establish it in policy. Political ends must govern, but they must not be a "tyrant."⁷⁵

Overlapping Expertise

However, there are at least several areas where military expertise overlaps with civilian expertise. In these areas, civilian and military leaders share some degree of responsibility. The first area involves assessments of international politics, the security environment, and the opportunity costs of acting in one area while ignoring another. Changes in alliance structures or the international situation can significantly influence military operations. According to Clausewitz, in some campaigns, everything "depends on the existing political affiliations, interests, traditions, lines of policy, and the personalities of princes, ministers, favorites, mistresses, and so forth."⁷⁶ Although military leaders may not possess special expertise in all matters of state, they do share responsibility for certain aspects of international politics, such as the preservation of the military components of alliance structures.

The second area pertains to integrating the military instrument with other instruments of state power. In some cases, Clausewitz recognizes that military tools will be only part of the state's overall strategy. In other cases, the use of military power will remain confined to "such minimal wars, which consist of merely threatening the enemy, with negotiations held in reserve."⁷⁷ While military leaders do not hold any particular diplomatic expertise, they nevertheless share a responsibility in ensuring military tools complement the other instruments of the state. Additionally, military expertise concerning the consequences and limits of military power is of exceptional importance in this area. Yet even if military power is not actually used or is used only in a limited manner, military expertise plays a role in shaping the state's policies of prevention and deterrence.

The final area of shared expertise relates to the establishment of limiting principles and the management of escalation dynamics. Clausewitz recognizes that states sometimes will find it in their interest to wage limited wars yet sees a potential trap in this approach. In situations involving minimal state interests, "the art of war will shrivel into prudence, and its main concern will be to make sure the delicate balance is not suddenly upset in the enemy's favor and the half-hearted war does not

become a real war after all.”⁷⁸ In these limited conflicts, the expertise of both civilian and military leaders must influence escalation dynamics. Together, they attempt to avoid a commitment of resources out of proportion with the desired ends.

Drawing the Lines

Although there are areas in which the military sphere overlaps with particular aspects in the civilian realm, there are nevertheless clear limits on military expertise. Clausewitz sees no circumstances under which military expertise will encompass questions regarding the ends of policy. However, he does not draw the same clear line with respect to the encroachment of policy onto combat. He reminds us that policy “is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.”⁷⁹ He explicitly states that, at the highest levels, the idea of a purely military opinion or purely military advice is absurd.⁸⁰ However, Clausewitz also does not draw a clear line beyond which “operational expertise ought to take over and political control cease.”⁸¹ Although he admits that policy will not dictate “the posting of guards or the employment of patrols,” he does admit that political considerations will be “influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, and often even of the battle.”⁸² As Suzanne Nielsen, an associate professor of international relations at the US Military Academy, has argued, “If political considerations may also be significant here, then Clausewitz does not establish a clear limitation on political control over military operations.”⁸³ Clausewitz does not expect military leaders to be involved in politics, but he does anticipate that political leaders will direct military affairs.

Figure 1 depicts the central features of this Clausewitzian framework for military advice. First, it shows the overlapping nature of the military and civilian spheres of expertise and highlights the need for ongoing strategic dialogue. Second, it demonstrates the unique features of military expertise, while also clearly identifying those factors that fall outside the military sphere. Third, it shows there is no clear boundary preventing the encroachment of political factors into the military realm; policy permeates all military operations, and political leaders retain legitimate authority over military decisions. Finally, it illustrates that—despite the development of military expertise—war will remain an unpredictable endeavor because military operations are a form of

human interaction that takes place within an environment of danger, chance, and uncertainty.

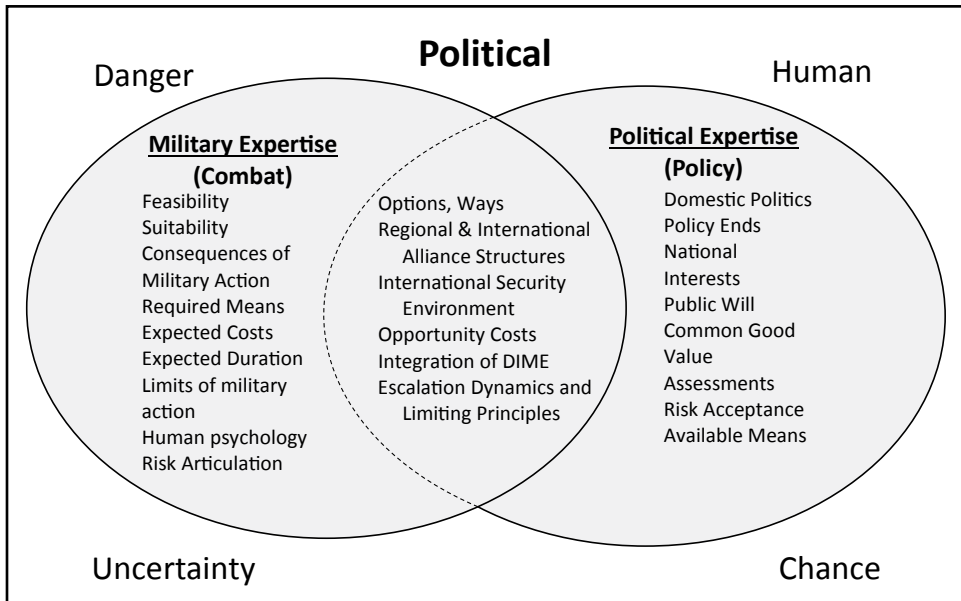


Figure 1: A Clausewitzian framework for the civil-military dialogue

This framework has several features that make it more attractive than previous models of civil-military interaction. In many ways, it actually subsumes and unifies several of the most-prominent models. For example, it retains civilian leaders' right to be wrong and prevents political activity by military leaders. It also encapsulates the unequal dialogue and recognizes that civilian leaders have a responsibility to ensure military activities support policy goals. Finally, it is consistent with Burk's conception of responsible obedience and suggests ways to operationalize this concept.

However, the Clausewitzian framework also adds new features to these existing models. First, it more carefully identifies the unique nature and limitations of military expertise. It focuses on the collaborative aspects of the civil-military dialogue and provides greater clarity on what role military experts can—and should—play in the policy-making process. In so doing, it takes the focus off issues like resignation and dissent, instead describing the role military experts should play in a successful

civil-military dialogue. Finally, it provides a basis for military competence based on trust. If military leaders do not add value to the policy-making process, this framework suggests that civilian leaders can—and will—withdraw autonomy from the military. Thus, military leaders face incentives to develop expertise and to offer their best advice while recognizing the limits of military expertise.

Practical Implications of a Clausewitzian Framework

There are a number of practical implications that would result from adopting this framework. Although civilian and military leaders both share responsibility, this article focuses primarily on the military side of the dialogue. Below are the most important practical lessons military leaders should keep in mind when engaging in strategic dialogue at the highest levels.

Senior military leaders provide clear military advice but should avoid commenting on topics that lie beyond the sphere of military expertise. The Clausewitzian framework developed above identifies some areas of special military expertise, and some areas where military expertise overlaps with civilian expertise. Policy permeates all military operations according to this framework; however, military experts cannot claim inviolable autonomy over any of these topic areas. Rather, military leaders must earn autonomy through expert advice in practice. They do so by providing candid, frank, and accurate assessments on issues within their expertise.

However, as figure 1 illustrates, although there are some areas of overlap between civilian and military spheres, certain aspects of civilian expertise lie clearly outside the military realm. Because the conduct of war is subordinate to the logic of politics, military leaders can claim no expertise in questions about whether the government should pursue a particular policy. They also cannot claim any legitimate basis upon which to assess the national interest, the public will, or the common good. As such, they should refrain from both public and private comments about whether a particular military policy or budget is in the best interest of the United States.

Senior military leaders should provide appropriate military expertise in private and in public. Although military leaders do not possess the expertise upon which to assess what policy should be, they nevertheless

have a duty to provide information that can inform civilian policy decisions. Unlike Brooks's focus on prohibited political tactics, however, this Clausewitzian framework instead focuses on content to determine whether military advice is appropriate. In so doing, it recognizes that military advice is always rendered in a political context and always has political implications, regardless of whether it is delivered in public or private. The framework further recognizes that military leaders often will be required to participate in events with extensive media coverage, such as official Department of Defense press conferences or congressional testimony. Thus, not only does this framework allow for public military advice, it actually requires military leaders to participate in the strategic dialogue in public. Yet it limits the topics on which they can engage to those within the clearly identified sphere of military expertise.

However, the logic of this framework is at least partially self-limiting; in addition to restricting the content of military advice, it also places de facto limits on which forums are appropriate for military engagement. For example, since military leaders base their assessments in professional expertise (limited though it may be), they should not write "opinion" articles or advocacy pieces related to policy questions. Army general Colin Powell's articles in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs* violated the framework because they commented on when it is appropriate for civilian leaders to use force.⁸⁴ This framework suggests that military leaders should not give policy speeches, since policy is beyond the scope of military responsibility and expertise. Similarly, military experts should not leak information to the press in an attempt to influence policy outcomes. Yet it also recognizes that military leaders have a responsibility to clarify the record if civilian leaders distort their advice in public.⁸⁵

However, this framework does not prohibit senior military leaders from all writing opportunities, speaking engagements, or media events. Yet it does suggest that articles and public engagements, including those with think tanks or civic groups, should remain focused on topics that do not extend beyond the military sphere. In addition, it suggests that senior military leaders will maintain a somewhat limited public profile.

Senior military leaders should provide the same information and advice to leaders in both the executive and legislative branches. Consistent with their constitutional responsibilities to serve both branches of government, military leaders have a responsibility to participate in the strategic dialogue with the president and members of Congress. Although military

leaders possess no authority to hold political leaders accountable under a Clausewitzian framework, members of Congress nevertheless rely on military expertise when providing political oversight of the executive branch. When they cannot obtain that expertise, the Clausewitzian assumption that political leaders have access to military information collapses. Because of this lack of information, one also can no longer assume that policy is a repository of the public will or the common good.

Of course, the statutory authority of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service chiefs under Title X, US Code may exacerbate the tendency for military officers to privilege their relationship with the president.⁸⁶ Moreover, the large number of legislators makes this type of broad sharing of expertise challenging, given current statutory and institutional arrangements. It is beyond the scope of this article to assess whether or not current laws or institutions undermine the civil-military relationship with respect to Congress. However, this framework does suggest that the strategic dialogue will be more effective if political leaders from both branches have ready access to military expertise. At a minimum, then, this framework suggests the need for regular military participation in robust oversight hearings in both public and unclassified settings.

Once again, however, it is worth emphasizing that the Clausewitzian framework does not simply focus on whether senior officers should dissent. Rather, it expects military officers to continually engage with elected civilian leaders from both branches in support of their constitutional duties. While Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki's comments about required troop levels in Iraq are one possible manifestation of this sort of dialogue, members of Congress may also need broader access to military advice to effectively carry out their constitutional duties to authorize the use of force and oversee executive policy implementation. Of course, not all military information can or should be publically communicated. Closed hearings and private meetings with senior military leaders may also improve the quality of the strategic dialogue.

Senior military leaders should recognize and articulate the uncertainty and limitations inherent in any military advice. Some pundits suggest that military leaders currently emphasize uncertainty only when it benefits them and their interests and minimize it when it is convenient to do so.⁸⁷ However, a Clausewitzian perspective indicates that military leaders must include a dose of humility into their assessments. As such, the

current practice of offering *best military advice* (BMA) is inconsistent with the Clausewitzian framework. In practice, it confers an air of legitimacy that military advice cannot attain.

Military expertise does provide valuable information during the strategic dialogue, and it should be one input into the policy-making process. Nevertheless, it will never be as precise in its diagnoses or prescriptions as expertise in other professions such as medicine and law is. Consequently, one might better conceive of military advice as a “considered military assessment” (CMA) containing significant uncertainty. Regardless of whether military leaders adopt a shift from BMA to CMA, the broader point remains that military leaders must be mindful not only of the friction of war but also of the uncertainty of future outcomes. The Clausewitzian framework sees experience as a lubricant that can partially mitigate uncertainty—not as something that can eliminate the effects of danger, chance, and human interaction in warfare.

Senior military leaders should render advice grounded in the profession’s expertise, not one professional’s view, and provide the full range of military opinion. Consistent with the previous point, military experts must also recognize that no one military leader can possess experience in all the aspects of joint warfare necessary to provide military advice. In short, no senior officer will have sufficient combat experience on land, in the air, or at sea. Moreover, even within one’s own experience, there often is considerable disagreement about what professional expertise has to say on the matter. As discussed earlier, this generally implies that there will be a range of opinions within or across the respective service professions.

The Clausewitzian perspective of a strategic dialogue also suggests that senior military leaders have a responsibility to share not only their “own” expert advice but also the broader range of expertise within the profession. Yet cases in which the advice of senior military officers conflict with one another in public have become increasingly rare since the establishment of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986. One notable exception is Gen Eric Shinseki’s testimony during the run up to the Iraq War, which at least partially contradicted the United States Central Command commander on troop estimates.⁸⁸

Although there is a statutory requirement under Title X, US Code for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to present diverging opinions, the law provides significant discretion in practice. Nevertheless, many opportunities for senior leaders to share competing perspectives exist

within the current deliberative process, including meetings of the operations deputies and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, on operational issues, opportunities that would inject diverse military views into the policy process are rarer since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Additionally, there is no formal institutional process to include service perspectives into the National Security Council process, and regional combatant commanders are only included on an ad hoc basis.

Senior military leaders should provide political leaders with a variety of military options but should work with civilians to bound possibilities. Although civilian leaders have sole responsibility for determining the ends of policy, the Clausewitzian framework recognizes that cost-benefit analyses and military factors may influence their decisions. As a result, it may be rare that civilian leaders will have identified the ends of policy at the beginning of the strategic dialogue between military and civilian leaders. As Janine Davidson, senior fellow for defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, has noted, civilian leaders are inclined to seek options, while military leaders want end states from which to plan.⁸⁹

The Clausewitzian framework anticipates this conundrum and suggests that military leaders should expect to work with civilian leaders through an iterative strategic dialogue—even when ends are not initially clear. In some—perhaps even most—cases, military leaders may need to be prepared to provide military options for more than one potential end state. Civilian leaders, for their part, should provide some strategic guidance on possible end states. While Clausewitz is silent on what this guidance might look like, it could include a “zone of tolerance” for potential outcomes or suggest multiple end states. Civilians also may direct military leaders to develop particular options. A Clausewitzian perspective of military advice accepts that civilian leaders may include considerations beyond purely military factors into their calculations. Nevertheless, military experts retain their responsibility to assess the feasibility and suitability of military operations as the dialogue matures.

Senior military leaders should provide well-supported military estimates and provide all information relevant to policymakers' decisions. The Clausewitzian framework suggests that seemingly self-serving behavior will undermine effective strategy. Since political leaders alone have responsibility for determining policy that serves the political will, military leaders distort strategy by appearing to withhold information or providing erroneous or unsupported estimates. Consequently, they must clearly ar-

ticulate their planning assumptions and defend their recommendations with data when available and with judgment when necessary. Although military experts must account for the friction of war and uncertainty when planning, they nevertheless should strive for optimality—the efficient use of state resources to accomplish political ends. The Clausewitzian framework suggests that, when they do not, they create an ends-ways or an ends-means mismatch.

Thus, military leaders who intentionally distort troop estimates or withhold information can also undermine confidence in military expertise and lead to further civilian encroachment into military autonomy. Since civilian leaders have the authority to dictate policy on all matters within the military sphere, they become increasingly likely to do so if military leaders do not produce results. The Clausewitzian framework depends on reliable and available military advice that allows civilian leaders to determine appropriate policy.

Conclusion


Recent debates about resignation and dissent exemplify a deeper problem in the literature on civil-military relations and the professional education of senior military leaders. Although scholars on both sides of these debates have offered thoughtful arguments about the topics of resignation and dissent, those scholars nevertheless have remained focused on issues that occur after the civil-military dialogue has broken down. This article attempts to widen the aperture of this debate and encourage other scholars to place renewed attention on how to improve the content and quality of the civil-military dialogue before it collapses. Questions about how to respond in the middle of crises are interesting, but focusing solely on crises ensures there will always be more to debate.

The Clausewitzian framework in this article is a starting point for future debate, but this model unifies several previous models of civil-military relations and integrates their insights into a more coherent whole. Perhaps most importantly, it adds additional content to discussions about the nature and limitations of military expertise. Thus, it attempts to help senior military leaders better understand how they can—and should—participate in the policy-making process. While recognizing the subordinate nature that military experts play in the unequal dialogue, this framework nevertheless aims to help military

experts effectively advise political leaders so civilians can exercise their right to be wrong as rarely as possible.

Adopting norms consistent with this model would improve the civil-military dialogue, but several of the implications hint that current institutional arrangements may make some aspects of the framework more difficult to apply than others. In many cases, however, scholars have not yet fully examined the effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Act and changes to Title X have had on the processes that dictate civil-military interactions at the strategic level.

How seriously do senior military leaders take their responsibilities to Congress, and what institutional changes might improve the quality and frequency of military advice? Additionally, are there any noticeable differences in the military consensus or internal dissent between institutional and operational-strategic policy areas? Has the Goldwater-Nichols Act changed the way in which senior military leaders provide advice to the executive and legislative branches in other significant ways?

Civil-military scholars must assess what norms should govern civil-military relations at the highest level and how professional military education has taught and transmitted norms. Are these programs effective in preparing officers for their responsibilities in the policy-making process? While many scholars focus their energy on what norms should be, the field would benefit from greater attention to empirical studies about whether these programs are effective in transmitting norms. To the extent it can, the United States should begin building the foundation and habits necessary for constructive strategic dialogue now. 

Notes

1. Statement of Martin Dempsey in “Testimony on U.S. Policy towards Iraq and Syria and the Threat Posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),” unclassified testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee (Washington, DC, 16 September 2014), <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/14-66%20-%209-16-14.pdf>.

2. Don M. Snider, “Should General Dempsey Resign? Army Professionals and the Moral Space for Dissent,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (web site), 21 October 2014, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/Should-General-Dempsey-Resign/2014/10/21>; James M. Dubik, “On Principled Resignation: A Response,” *Best Defense Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 14 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/14/on-principled-resignation-a-response/>; and James M. Dubik, “No Avoiding Moral Responsibility in War: Is There Ever a Time to Resign?,” *Army Magazine*, February 2015, <http://www.armymagazine.org/2015/01/13/no-avoiding-moral-responsibility-in-war-is-there-ever-a-time-to-resign/>.

3. In 1999, only 26 percent of elite veterans agreed that a senior officer should resign in protest in the face of an “unwise” order. By 2014, however, 63 percent thought so. See, for example, James Thomas Golby, Peter D. Feaver, and Lindsay P. Cohn, “Thanks for Your Service: Civilian and Veteran Attitudes After Fifteen Years of War,” in *What Difference Does Two Wars Make?*, edited by Kori Schake and James Mattis (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution, forthcoming 2015).

4. It is possible that at least part of this increase is the result of blogs and social media that lower barriers to entry into professional debates of this type and are more accessible.

5. Gary Anderson, “Is It Time for General Dempsey to Resign?,” *Best Defense Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 26 September 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/26/is-it-time-for-general-dempsey-to-resign/>; Seth Cropsey, “The Obama-Military Divide,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 September 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/seth-cropsey-the-obama-military-divide-1412033300>; and Andrew Tilghman and Jeff Schogol, “Calls for Brass to Resign Add to Debate over Mideast Policy,” *Military Times*, 30 September 2014, <http://archive.militarytimes.com/article/20140930/NEWS05/309300067/Calls-brass-resign-add-debate-over-Mideast-policy>.

6. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). For a discussion of various interpretations of McMaster’s book, also see Peter D. Feaver, “Should Senior Military Officers Resign in Protest if Obama Disregards Their Advice?,” *Shadow Government Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 7 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/07/should-senior-military-officers-resign-in-protest-if-obama-disregards-their-advice/>.

7. Anderson, “Is It Time for General Dempsey to Resign?”

8. Ibid.

9. Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

10. Richard H. Kohn, “Always Salute, Never Resign,” *Foreign Affairs*, 10 November 2009, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2009-11-10/always-salute-never-resign>.

11. Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 465–67.

12. Don M. Snider, “Should General Dempsey Resign?”

13. Ibid.; also see James Burk, “Responsible Obedience by Military Professionals: The Discretion to Do What is Wrong,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 149–71; and Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 55.

14. Snider, “Should General Dempsey Resign?”

15. Dubik, “No Avoiding Moral Responsibility in War.”

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Given that there is no tradition of resignation in the US military, it is difficult to say empirically whether a senior officer’s decision to resign would become politicized in the middle of a contentious war. For further discussion, see Richard H. Kohn, “Always Salute, Never Resign.”

19. Here I follow Kohn’s definition of high-level resignations as only those including four-star officers serving in positions on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in combatant commands, or other ad hoc wartime command positions at that level of visibility.

20. Dubik, “No Avoiding Moral Responsibility in War.”

21. Peter D. Feaver, "Military Resignation in Protest is Still a Bad Idea," *Shadow Government Blog*, ForeignPolicy.com, 24 October 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/24/military-resignation-in-protest-is-still-a-bad-idea/>.

22. On the limited nature of military expertise, see Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 258–64; Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68–75; and Risa A. Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 213–38.

23. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976). For a more modern argument, see Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); or Cohen, *Supreme Command*.

24. Frank Hoffman, "A New American Military Ethic," *War on the Rocks Blog*, 6 August 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/08/a-new-american-military-ethic/>.

25. Snider, "Should General Dempsey Resign?"

26. James Burk, "Responsible Obedience by Military Professionals," 149–71.

27. *Ibid.*, 158.

28. Clausewitz, *On War*; and Cohen, *Supreme Command*.

29. Richard H. Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security: The Intent of the Framers," in *The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789–1989* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 61–94.

30. Burk, "Responsible Obedience by Military Professionals," 156.

31. For an alternative to this argument, see Snider, "Should General Dempsey Resign?"

32. *Ibid.*; and Dubik, "On Principled Resignation."

33. Golby, Cohn, and Feaver, "Thanks for Your Service."

34. James Thomas Golby, "Self-Interest Misunderstood: Military Partisanship and Public Trust" (presentation, Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Chicago, IL, October 2013).

35. Lewis Sorley, *Honorable Warrior: General Harold K. Johnson and the Ethics of Command* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); and McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 310–14.

36. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 311.

37. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957).

38. For a more thorough discussion of this point, see Christopher P. Gibson, "Enhancing National Security and Civilian Control of the Military: A Madisonian Approach," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 239–63.

39. Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 1, *The Army Profession*, June 2013, 6-3.

40. Brooks, "Militaries and Political Activity in Democracies," 213–38.

41. *Ibid.*, 219. Brooks identifies five types of political activity, including "public appeals, grandstanding, politicking, alliance building, and shoulder tapping."

42. For examples, see Feaver, "Military Resignation in Protest;" Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "Infusing Normative Civil-Military Relations in the Officers Corps," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed., edited by Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2005), 663–65; and Don M. Snider "Dissent and Strategic Leadership of the Military Professions," *Orbis* 52, no. 2 (2008): 256–77.

43. James Thomas Golby, "Duty, Honor, Party: Ideology, Institutions, and the Use of Force" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2011).
44. For a counterargument, see Rob Atkinson, *The Limits of Military Officers' Duty to Obey Civilian Orders* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, forthcoming).
45. Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.
46. Suzanne C. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game? The Weinberger Doctrine and the American Use of Force," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed., edited by Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2005), 632.
47. Clausewitz, *On War*, 187.
48. Ibid., 605.
49. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 636.
50. Clausewitz, *On War*, 608.
51. Ibid., 95.
52. Ibid.
53. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 632.
54. Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.
55. Ibid., 178.
56. Ibid., 119–20.
57. Warner R. Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950," in *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*, edited by Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 13.
58. For a full discussion of Clausewitz's view of "optimality" maximizing the effective use of one's limited resources, see Suzanne C. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force: A Clausewitzian Perspective*, The Letort Papers (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 21–24.
59. Clausewitz, *On War*, 78.
60. Ibid., 585.
61. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 633. Also, see Clausewitz, 164, for a discussion of the importance of military history as a substitute for experience.
62. Clausewitz, *On War*, 120.
63. Ibid., 93.
64. Ibid., 94.
65. Ibid., 608.
66. Ibid., 81.
67. Ibid., 605.
68. Ibid. For a more nuanced discussion of the unity and distinctiveness of the civilian and military spheres, see Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 10–14.
69. Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
70. Ibid., 606–07.
71. Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," 635.
72. Clausewitz, *On War*, 144.
73. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 28. Also, see Clausewitz, *On War*, 89, 196, and 360.
74. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 28–29.
75. Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.
76. Ibid., 569; but see Nielsen, "Rules of the Game?," which argues that Clausewitz places all matters of international politics outside the sphere of military expertise.

77. Clausewitz, *On War*, 604.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 607.
80. Ibid.
81. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 25.
82. Clausewitz, *On War*, 606.
83. Nielsen, *Political Control over the Use of Force*, 26.
84. Colin L. Powell “Why Generals Get Nervous,” *New York Times*, 8 October 1992, A35; and Colin L. Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 5 (Winter 1992–1993): 36–41.
85. Peter D. Feaver, “Military Resignation in Protest.”
86. See Title 10, US Code, Chapter 5, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/subtitle-A/part-I/chapter-5>. Title 10 identifies the CJCS as the “principal military advisor” and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) as “military advisors” to the president, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the secretary of defense, but requires the JCS to inform the secretary of defense before making recommendations to Congress.
87. Micah Zenko, “How the U.S. Military Thinks about Complexity,” *Politics, Power, and Preventive Action Blog*, Council on Foreign Relations, 19 March 2015, <http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2015/03/19/how-the-u-s-military-thinks-about-complexity/>.
88. Matthew Moten, “A Broken Dialogue: Rumsfeld, Shinseki, and Civil-Military Tension,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, edited by Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 42–71.
89. Janine Davidson, “Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision Making: Explaining the Broken Dialogue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 2013): 129–45.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed or implied in SSQ are those of the authors and are not officially sanctioned by any agency or department of the US government. We encourage you to send comments to: strategicstudiesquarterly@us.af.mil.